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Contact: John R. Kemp

FOSTER MAKES HIGHER ED AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT TOP PRIORITY IN NEXT YEAR'S AGENDA

BATON ROUGE -- Higher education funding, workforce development and keeping the “best and brightest” college graduates in Louisiana will be Governor Foster’s top priority in next year’s agenda and state budget, Foster’s chief of staff said today at a meeting of the Board of Regents for postsecondary education.

Chief of Staff Steven Perry outlined a multi-phased plan for the next two years of the Foster administration that focuses entirely on economic development. The governor’s plan, he said, will contain three parts. The first will deal with rural economic development in north and south Louisiana. The second part of the plan will create partnerships with universities, private industry and government to create new products and technology. The third phase “will be a huge push in manufacturing,” he said.

Elements within the three phased-plan will include workforce training, university funding issues, expansion of commerce and the healthcare industries in New Orleans, and a major effort to attract and retain high-achieving college graduates and graduate students. He said the governor may call a special legislative session next spring to deal with his plan.

Perry also announced that in the coming weeks the administration will launch a ten-year “Braingain 2010” initiative designed to attract, recruit and retain “our bright young people here from an educational and economic perspective.” He said a special taskforce will be created to look at issues such as out-of-state tuition policies. “What we have now is not working,” he said. “Our current